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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

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# *Cutover Problems*

## Colonization, Depression, Reforestation

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin

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by

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The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
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# CUTOVER PROBLEMS

## Colonization, Depression, Reforestation

*by*

JAMES I. CLARK

ONE DAY IN 1919 John Swenehart was bouncing along a Barron County road in a Ford touring car, headed for Rice Lake. Swenehart, in charge of land clearing demonstrations for the College of Agriculture, was going to show some farmers a new way to remove stumps from cut-over land. He had a back seat full of TNT.

Up ahead Swenehart spied a man walking. He pulled up and called out,

> "Want a ride?" "Sure." So he gets into the car. Start drivin'. Tells me where he's goin'. Where he's goin' is ahead north and west. Well, pretty soon he sees these blankets back there, and some white boxes. Nice clean boxes. He says, "What's in there?" "Oh," I says, "that's TNT, that we're goin' to fix up so you farmers can have cheap dynamite." Well, he began to get jittery, and holdin' onto his seat. Come a little trail off to the right, which was the wrong direction which he was goin'. He says, "Here's my stop! Here's my stop!" He didn't even wait for me to stop the car til he was hikin' into the woods.

That man's reaction was not extraordinary. Everybody knew that TNT was mighty dangerous stuff, and powerful. A Madison minister informed his congregation that a pinch of TNT placed there on the pulpit would blow up not only the church, but the whole city block as well. Farmers attended demonstrations where College of Agriculture men used the explosive to blow up stumps, but they stood well back. Perhaps they couldn't see just what was going on but at least they would live to say they'd been there.

Stump removal was one of the hardest tasks Northern Wisconsin pioneers had to face. If a man waited long enough, hardwood stumps eventually rotted. Pine didn't. And the roots of those trees fanned out over a large area, disturbing a lot of soil when they came out.

Various stump pulling devices were tried. A steam-driven puller using a heavy steel cable and a drum worked in Rusk County in 1910. That machine cleared about two acres daily but was heavy and didn't maneuver easily. Many farmers used horsepower and a winch; others relied entirely on manpower.

Then the College of Agriculture experimented with dynamite and put out a bulletin on its use in 1912. Four years later the Department of Agricultural Engineering worked out a plan to give Cutover farmers on-the-spot education in getting stumps out of the soil.

*Diemer Collection, College of Agriculture Library.*

**The Special pulls in.**

In 1916 the first "Land Clearing Special"—a train of eight cars—rolled into Northern Wisconsin. The Du Pont Company furnished dynamite and several manufacturers sent along stump pulling machines. Farmers met the train at each of its 18 stops. They hauled equipment to the demonstration plots and all day long the area was filled with the noise of machinery and exploding dynamite as stumps were extracted or blown from the ground. Some of the 8,000 farmers walked 25 miles to see the shows. The College got inquiries on the program from all over the country. Films of the work were shown as far away as Arizona.

The next year another "Special" toured the northland. Farmers organized to pool orders for dynamite and machinery. In 1919 the College set up several two-day schools in the use of explosives.

At the end of World War I the federal government had large surplus supplies of TNT. A lot of it was going to be dumped into the ocean because it was considered too dangerous to store. H. L. Russell, who had become Dean of the College of Agriculture in 1907, heard about that. Hating to see anything go to waste that might help Northern Wisconsin farmers clear their land, Russell got some surplus TNT for experimental purposes. John Swenehart was put in charge.

After he learned to handle the stuff, Swenehart went into business in tar paper shacks near Bayfield, on Lake Superior. There a crew of 35 men made paraffin-covered newspaper cartridges of TNT. Besides being more powerful than dynamite, it was considerably cheaper. The College sold it for less than 8¢ a pound, one-third the price of the other explosive.

Preparing TNT was somewhat easier than persuading Northern Wisconsin farmers to use it. Actually,

*Diemer Collection, College of Agriculture Library.*

The people are instructed.

wartime stories of its touchiness had been exaggerated. Less caution was needed in handling it than was required in working with dynamite. Swenehart and his men set out to prove that.

At field demonstrations they loudly and vigorously tamped the explosive into stumps with hardwood sticks. There was no explosion and spectators usually edged a little closer. Bullets were fired into TNT and cartridges left next to exploding stumps to prove that the material wouldn't go off on impact, as dynamite did. Gradually word got around that these college men weren't as crazy and foolhardy as they seemed. Orders for TNT poured in.

The College also proved that picric acid, another explosive, was safe to use on stumps. Experimenters mixed sodium nitrate with TNT and produced sodatol. Smokeless powder mixed with nitroglycerin made pyrotol. Between 1919 and 1928 Wisconsin farmers ordered almost 19 million pounds of these various stump-removing aids. That was nearly a third of the amount used in all other states of the Union combined.[1]

## The Wisconsin Colonization Company

Men of the College of Agriculture had aided Cutover farmers in the past. In 1896 Dean William A. Henry had published *Northern Wisconsin, A Handbook for the Homeseeker,* which contained information on special problems, soil, climate and possibilities of the northland. Over the years faculty members had conducted seed and plant experiments to find those best suited to Northern Wisconsin conditions. Such work was an aid to land companies, state agencies, local and regional groups, and local newspapers, which had promoted agricultural settlement of the area for a long time.

Even with such help and promo-

*Diemer Collection, College of Agriculture Library.*

**One less stump.**

tion the northern counties had not become heavily populated. Relatively few of the millions of stump-filled acres had been cleared and planted to crops. Early in the 20th century a movement got started to do something else with the Cutover. Various groups were convinced that most of the land would grow only trees and wanted to reforest the counties of Northern Wisconsin.

A State Board of Forestry was created in 1905 and made some progress in setting aside forest reserves. But ten years later the state supreme court declared forestry laws unconstitutional, and large-scale plans were ended. A program continued, but it was a pale shadow of former designs. Popular interest in forestry diminished considerably. The way was open for unhindered farm development.

Promoters now had a new idea on settling the Cutover. They agreed that the lonely pioneer who went out into the wilderness, cleared his land and opened the way for others had done a lot for America. Gradually more people had followed him into wild regions and small, isolated settlements became communities—a cluster of farms, or villages and cities.

But the day of that kind of trail blazer was over. There was still wild, undeveloped land to settle, yet those who made new wilderness homes now would need the help and guidance of many people. Agricultural standards of living had risen over the years. Potential farmers for areas like Northern Wisconsin wouldn't put up with the rough conditions and hardships that were part of getting started. They must be aided by community cooperation and land company guidance.

"We must never sell a piece of land to anyone unless we ourselves

A College of Agriculture traveling school.

believe that it can be developed into a successful farm as the man dreams who is buying it," said a man named Benjamin Faast. He and his colonization company associates were prepared to do all they could to make those dreams come true.

Promoting Cutover land during the World War I era, Faast and others went beyond their 19th and earlier 20th century predecessors, who for the most part sold land and let the buyer shift for himself. Instead of trusting that communities would develop around isolated settlers, new-style promoters planned farm communities and villages, carefully selected their residents, and gave them supervision and education.

These promoters were also aided by the war. Grain and meat demands and high prices caused many people to invest in farm land, both good and marginal acreage. Small farmers seized the opportunity to become bigger. City dwellers took a chance on making that "little farm of my own" vision come true.

Benjamin Faast's Wisconsin Colonization Company began in 1917. Started with over $210,000, the company opened operations by purchasing 50,000 southern Sawyer County acres. One of the first projects was planning and laying out a model village, Ojibway. There a uniform colonial style architecture would be used. Land would be carefully zoned for business, industrial and residential use.

A research and demonstration farm was established to gather data on seeds, soil and land types. It also housed animals that were to be sold or given to settlers. Here the College of Agriculture was very helpful.

Faast and his company advertised in local and Middlewestern papers, some years spending over $10,000 on that part of the business. Some of

*Courtesy DeLong Studio, Madison*

Benjamin Faast

the best responses came from Polish newspaper readers in Milwaukee, Chicago and Detroit. There were also representatives of many nationalities as well as native-born Americans who purchased Wisconsin Colonization Company land. During the first two years of operation about 350 farms were sold.

A variety of services was offered newcomers to the Cutover. If he desired, a settler could have his choice of a "made to order" farm. He could select 40 to 160 acres at $25 to $40 an acre, on which would be built one of several styles of houses. Such houses ranged from $500 to $1,000. The cheapest was 16 x 20 feet, with three windows. Front and sides had siding; the back was covered with tar paper. A story and a half house plus a small barn could be had for a slightly higher price. For both land and buildings down payments were low and the farmer had liberal terms on which to pay off the mortgage.

The settler could also have timothy and clover seed, a cow, two pigs, and farm tools. If he wanted, the company would even provide furniture for his house.

Company maps and charts showed which parts of a farm to clear first and where suitable construction timber could be found. Other maps indicated locations for woodlots, gardens, fields and buildings, based on topographical and soil type data gathered in the area.

Once he started to clear and till the land, the 20th century pioneer was closely supervised and aided in every possible way. He was also prodded when necessary to continue clearing and improving the land. If he fell behind what the company considered a reasonable schedule, he got notes reminding him to keep busy. If he still didn't progress as rapidly as company officers felt he should, they suggested that since he wasn't improving much land, perhaps he would like to settle his mortgage right away.

The ideal settler, according to Faast, was one who plowed 3 to 5 new acres each year, added up to 3 cows, 3 to 7 pigs and sheep, and 25 to 50 chickens. His garden was filled with vegetables and fruit, and all cleared fields were planted to grains and root crops for the livestock. There were also a few acres of potatoes, rutabagas, sugar beets and cabbage. Never idle, the up-and-coming farmer spent his winters cutting wood to sell in nearby towns.

Some settlers didn't like such close supervision and feared they would never be left on their own. Others complained that the company profited on the sale of tools and seeds that were supposed to be offered at cost. Some said housing was poor.

Selling "made-to-order" farms.

The company was accused of reserving huge estates under the guise of demonstration farms. There were also gripes about having to find outside work in cities to earn a living.

Faast denied those charges and claimed his company offered settlers a better deal than any other colonization group. He contended that the company lost money on livestock furnished to farmers. Demonstration farms would eventually be divided up and sold. The company had never said outside work wouldn't be necessary. But it also helped settlers find such work whenever possible.

Regardless of who was right in these matters, the Wisconsin and other colonization companies made it easier for settlers to get started than promoters had in the past. They wanted to make a profit, but they also demonstrated that they had some ideas about the social needs of farmers in the services they offered to help make the venture succeed.

Other companies also emphasized this new colonization slant. The Tomahawk Land Company, for example, carefully screened out bad risks among applicants for land. A field man helped the settler choose a farm from about 80,000 company acres. Two or three acres were cleared and a house and barn erected. The farmer would also get a cow, a pig, and a dozen chickens. Seeds and fertilizer were available at wholesale prices. Once started, the settler could compete for annual "best garden" prizes offered by the company.

Other company services included renting stump pulling machinery, horses, and harvesting equipment. A demonstration farm that stocked over $16,000 worth of purebred cattle issued frequent bulletins about what to plant and where, when and how.

Wisconsin Colonization Company

Not all land passed into settlers' hands through such colonization companies of course. There were still plenty of private dealers at work, and railroads and some lumber companies had land to sell. County and regional promotional organizations formed and re-formed, as they had in the past. Country weeklies boosted local agricultural land.

In Minnesota and Michigan, states with cut-over land like Wisconsin, different selling methods were used. Most Minnesota land was disposed of by agents and dealers, and there was not as much intensive colonization as in Wisconsin, where land was owned in larger tracts. Michigan didn't push land sales as hard as Badger State promoters, nor were colonization methods used much.[2]

## The Board of Immigration

Not only had private companies become infected with new ideas on settling the Cutover, but the Wisconsin Board of Immigration also changed its tactics.

A new emphasis was felt after 1911, when B. G. Packer became head of the Board. Packer contended that potential newcomers should have the cold facts. They should be discouraged from Cutover farming if they lacked sufficient capital, knowledge and endurance. He figured $1,200 was needed to get a family through the first two years. Settlers would be given all possible aid, but the Board of Immigration now was interested only in those who had the potential to make a go of farming

Farms in Northern Wisconsin.

Northern Wisconsin and would stay on the land and become useful, productive citizens. This was in sharp contrast to the shotgun, catch-as-catch can promotional methods of former Boards.

Now immigration pamphlets were published mostly in English, and particular aspects of farming the northland were stressed. Bulletins describing dairying, beef raising, and other farm activities were designed to acquaint settlers with the peculiar problems of the area and to lend aid in solving them. Along with that literature, would-be farmers got soil survey maps and College of Agriculture bulletins to help them select the best land, and decide what kind of farming they wanted to do.

The Board worked closely with the State Board of Health and Department of Public Instruction, agencies which were also concerned with Cutover settlers. Northern Wisconsin products were exhibited at fairs, school children wrote essays on Wisconsin and its agricultural development, and the Board of Immigration used movies and lectures in acquainting people with the land. In 1916 a "Wisconsin Products Special" was sent along the railroads of Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and parts of Wisconsin, to show what could be grown in the northern counties. By 1922 about 8,000 people had inquired about land there. Perhaps 80% of them had seen Immigration Board ads in rural newspapers. Nearly all were interested in soil and climate.



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The Wisconsin legislature supported immigration services with annual appropriations and did other things to aid Northern farmers. County boards were allowed to set up loan funds to aid settlers. Railroads could offer reduced passenger rates. School funds were made available for state investments in farm mortgages.

Land cleared in 1920 amounted to 90,000 acres. Half a million stumpland acres had been worked over eight years later. The 1910-1920 annual land clearance had been about 50,000. Considerable progress had been made.[3]

## Depression Years

With such an abundance of state and private aid it would perhaps seem that Northern Wisconsin farmers had an easy time of it. That was not quite the case. Actually population gains were small, and the amount of acreage in crops was only a fraction of the total amount of land that was available.

By 1920 more than 20,000 new farms had appeared in the Cutover counties, representing two million acres of land. Half of that had been cleared and planted since 1900. Yet most of the several million acres were still in stumps and swamps. The greatest progress was still in the southern row of counties—Clark, Marathon, Chippewa and the others. There more than 60% of the land was in farms, although only half of that percentage was actually under cultivation. For the rest of the Cutover, hardly 7% of the land could be called improved or in farm crops.

Marathon County, one of the more attractive areas for settlers, had a 1920 population of over 65,000, double that of the beginning of the century. Nearly 250,000 of the county's acres had been cleared and there were about 6,000 farms. In contrast, progress had been slower in Ashland County. There the 20,000 people of 1890 had been joined by scarcely 4,000 more by 1920. During those years the number of farms had increased from less than 200 to a little over 1,000. Only 36,000 of the county's 692,000 acres had been cleared.

The 24 northern counties had gained about 300,000 people in twenty years. During the same time Milwaukee increased by over 250,000 people.[4] The steady and overwhelming flow of settlers expected by Northern Wisconsin promoters never showed up, in spite of all the land sellers did. More poor land was sold than should have been and farmer turnover was high. Then came the farm depression of the 1920s.

Wartime demands for grains, meat and their by-products brought boom times to American farmers. Incomes and standards of living went up. Cars, trucks, tractors and other labor-saving machinery became more common on farms. Electricity and the telephone spread into rural areas. Farmers enjoyed a much better life than had their fathers. Yet with a slackening home and foreign market at the end of the war, they had to struggle to maintain it.

There were high mortgage payments to make and taxes to pay. Land values declined. Farmers produced huge crops, and prices kept going down.

By 1921 the agricultural situation

was pretty bad. That winter Dakota and Nebraska farmers were burning grain for fuel because it was cheaper than shipping it to market. A general depression hit America right after the war; but as industry pulled out and once again enjoyed good times, things didn't improve much for farmers.

## In Northern Wisconsin

Many settlers on cut-over land had made slow and sometimes painful progress along the road to a farm of their own. Many had cleared less than ten or a dozen acres. Some were farming a few more among the stumps. A few chickens, fewer cows, perhaps a horse between two families, represented the main accumulation of livestock. The average settler had perhaps $1,000 worth of buildings and a little over $100 worth of machinery.

Northern Wisconsin farmers were in no shape to stand a nation-wide agricultural depression. Neither were the land companies. By 1922 the Wisconsin Colonization Company was having trouble meeting its financial obligations. Ojibway's "Trading Post," the main store in town, sent notices to pay up. It also mentioned that it was quitting business. "In fact," said the letters, "we have not been selling very much at the Post for the last two or three months." The model village suffered for want of population, and never became the dream town Benjamin Faast had so carefully planned.

Soon various state agencies were discouraging people from moving into the Cutover. The amount of land on which taxes were unpaid increased rapidly. By 1921 over a million acres in 17 counties were delinquent. Five years later one Lincoln County township which had been settled by a colonization company reported more than half it farms abandoned. One more year and over 2¼ million Northern Wisconsin acres could be had by paying the taxes. There were few buyers.

Dean Harry L. Russell.

Before the end of the decade Dean Russell, long a loyal and tireless friend of the small Cutover farmer, wrote:

> The belief was long held that the plow would follow the woodsman's ax and that much of these timbered areas would be ultimately in golden grain and rich green alfalfa and clover. Now we know that there is time to grow one or more crops of pulp or lumber before these undevolped acres that are suitable for cropping will be needed for farm use.

Northern Wisconsin needed help. In 1925 the legislature appointed a committee to study the area's tax situation. The committee toured the cut-over counties and listened to tales of troubles and suggestions on what should be done.

Committee members heard about increased tax delinquency, and the need for better fire protection of forest and cut-over land. They also discovered quite a bit of interest in re-

forestation. The Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company of Port Edwards had already started a forestry program to maintain a pulp supply. That company wanted timberland tax reforms. D. C. Everest, representing the Pulp and Paper Manufacturers of Wausau, asked for better fire protection so that timber owners could obtain cheaper insurance. He offered a plan by which companies would share the cost of such services with the state. Everest also argued for lower taxes on growing trees and proposed a 10% to 15% tax on their value when harvested.

A few things had already been done to revive Wisconsin's forestry program. The Progressive Republicans had been returned to state offices in 1920 and a constitutional amendment passed allowing Wisconsin to spend money to build forest reserves. In 1924 the amendment was approved by the voters. Next year a law was passed authorizing the federal government to purchase up to 100,000 acres for reforestation and parks. The amount was later increased.

Then in 1927 another constitutional amendment was approved to allow timberlands to be taxed on a different basis from other property. That cleared the way for the Forest Crop Law. With this the owner of growing trees would pay an annual tax of 10¢ per acre until they were cut. Then he would pay a tax of 10% of the crop's value.

Not many people took advantage of this law at first, but several counties got to work on farm, forest and tax problems. Surveys of agricultural development, government expenses, property values, road and school facilities, soil classification and crop acreage of each township were made. These facts could be used to figure out the best use for land and discover ways of reducing expenses and tax delinquency.

Meanwhile another legislative committee started to look into forestry and public land problems. This group listened to people in Antigo, Ashland, Superior, Wausau and other cities. It even went to investigate land use problems and solutions in several eastern states.

In Northern Wisconsin the committee heard about tax delinquency, the need for more changes in timberland taxation, comments on the new Forest Crop Law and stories about isolated settlers. Most people thought the Crop Law should pay more to counties. They also thought it had to be aided by more adequate fire protection. Some wanted more government work in reforestation; others insisted that with proper tax reforms and fire protection individuals could do the job.

Again and again isolated settler troubles were pointed up. Not only were such people problems to themselves, but they cost local taxpayers a lot of money for schools and roads. Living far from neighbors, isolated farmers had trouble getting help when needed. In forested areas they created a fire hazard. As one Oneida County man later pointed out:

> A few years ago a man and his family came here from the southern part of Wisconsin He bought a "forty" of land north of Highway No. 8 several miles from any neighbors and without any road leading to it. He asked the town

board to build him a road. We of the town board refused. The next year, when there were two new members on our town board, a petition was circulated for a road and was presented to our board. The new members voted to build the road. It cost $1200.00 to build that road. This man used the road just once—to move out of the town. There the road lies, and we spent $1200.00 of our taxpayers' money for no good purpose. . . .

Many people thought that rural zoning laws would prevent such difficulties in the future. Such laws would give local governments power to decide whether particular land should be used for farming, forests, or recreation. Those already on unprofitable land could be moved to where they might receive governmental services at lower cost. A county zoning law was therefore passed by the legislature in 1929.[5]

## The Big Depression

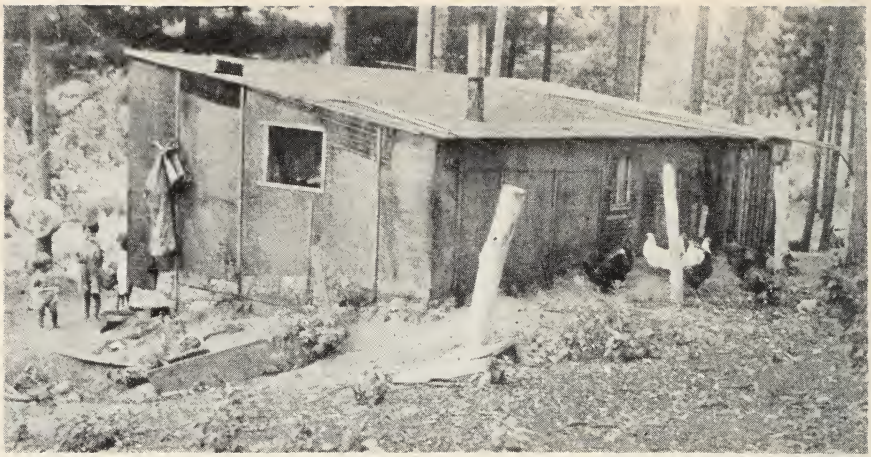
The picture was far from rosy, but by about 1930 state legislation plus town and county self help was beginning to solve some Cutover problems. Northern counties were now able to do something positive with their land. Lumber and paper companies could expand reforestation programs without fear of losing heavily from taxation. Better fire protection was assured. School equalization laws—plans by which the more well-to-do counties helped pay school costs in less fortunate areas—helped local education. The distribution of the state gasoline tax income helped reduce town and county road taxes.

Then the bottom dropped out of the world. The stock market broke in 1929 and gradually the effects spread across the country. Factories closed, people were out of work, incomes dropped. The nation moved into its biggest depression.

In Northern Wisconsin, where many people were barely hanging on anyway, this was almost a final blow. One Cutover farmer spoke before a legislative committee on Northern Wisconsin problems in 1932:

> I came up there in 1907, started with one forty, and I still have three forties now. Most of these people that came up there have big families and no money. Some of their children have been educated here, and then went to look for some work in the big cities, got married and of course they are all coming back nowadays, with their families, and our big problem is the question of who is going to take care of them. . . . Now I have a family of seven myself; they are all coming back, and I have to feed them and keep them in shoes, and you see I am not ashamed to tell it. . . . I wear overalls that are not paid for, and I even read newspapers that are not paid for. . . . My income out of that farm never reached $1,000 a year, but I could make a pretty fair living, and I did, and I don't look so poor today yet that I could somehow get around. However, in 1931 and this year that whole income came down to about $450.

"We have a town there where the town chairman was in the other day and said that the town had absolutely no money with which to conduct its business, and would have no money to hold the primary and general elections this fall," said a man at the Medford hearing. At Phillips a witness pointed out that



*Courtesy W. A. Rowlands*

Isolated.

> we have somewhere about eight families where the son-in-laws [*sic*] and daughter-in-laws [*sic*] came flocking in here. When things were going good in the city, they went to Chicago . . . and now, all of a sudden, there is nothing to do and they come back bag and baggage, and so I think that situation will have a bearing on your taxes next winter.[6]

Many counties stepped up their programs of land use and development. Zoning, establishment of town, county and school forests, the enlargement of national forests, the removal of isolated settlers, great improvements in fire protection and many other items were parts of those programs. State, and later federal government, aid was given.

Oneida County, for example, had already made a land survey aided by the county agent and the College of Agriculture. A bulletin, "Making the Most of Oneida County Land," was published in 1931. A colonization committee was set up to locate and re-locate people on land that would produce a decent living, near good schools and roads.

In 1933 county officers held educational meetings to explain a recently passed zoning ordinance. There were complaints that zoning sealed off any possibility for agricultural development. Officials explained that only poor land would be classified as forest or recreational. Those areas with good soil that could be developed would be farmed. Other people objected that zoning interfered with the personal liberty of an individual to settle wherever he pleased. That ideal had been upheld throughout the nation's history. It could be given credit for turning a lot of wild land into productive farms and communities. Zoning did interfere with personal liberty. But in an interdependent age it was necessary to think of the general taxpayers' interests. As one man said, "We can never hope to blend the old ideal of free pioneering as exemplified by Daniel Boone with the newer ideal of providing government services to anyone regardless of location."

Under zoning procedures many isolated settlers were moved to land where they could make a living and get such services at less expense. The

*Courtesy W. A. Rowlands*

Abandoned.

story was told of one man who bought a small farm on land that proved to be too wet and swampy to support him and his family.

> Sam had sunk his life-savings of $5,000 into his farm. He had to ask for relief to keep his wife and four small boys. This hurt Sam's pride, he became bitter, irritable and grouchy. His boys had to be transported to a school . . . because there were no schools in the neighborhood.
>
> We bought Sam's farm and paid him cash for it. He bought 80 acres of good productive land in a high state of fertility [elsewhere]. He has a nicely furnished brick house equipped with a furnace and electric lights, a good barn and 18 head of livestock. Sam is all smiles now.

An Ashland County editor said:

> We viewed one of these farm relocation propositions down near Glidden yesterday. A farmer who had located in the forest, and in the restricted district under the Ashland County Zoning Ordinance, six miles from nowhere, but who had cleared forty acres and had a fair set of farm buildings, was moved to a farm on a highway with just as good soil, just as many acres, and just as good buildings and a school nearby for his children. The farmer wins, he is better located in every way. The town and county win, because of the saving of expense in snow removal, road upkeep and school transportation for the farmer's children.
>
> The original farm, now county-owned, becomes a part of the county forest, and under the zoning law cannot be used for agricultural purposes any more. . . . It cost the county $1300.00 to move this farmer from the place we viewed. The county will save more than that in three years by having eliminated the expense of serving that particular isolated farm with roads, snow removal and school facilities.

## Reforestation Progresses

By 1934 eighteen counties had zoning ordinances. Nineteen more established them by 1948. Three years later a third of the counties in the United States had taken stock of their land and resources and set up zones for settlement, recreation, and other land uses.[7]

A modern Vilas County dairy farm.

Zoning aided the reforestation program. Federal purchases continued and in the 1930s two national forests, Nicolet and Chequamegon, were begun. At the present time over 2.1 million acres of Wisconsin are managed by the United States government. As early as 1942 Wisconsin had nearly 220,000 acres in eight state forests.

Other types of forest holdings increased also. Nearly 240,000 acres were being operated under the Forest Crop Law at the beginning of the present decade. Twenty-eight counties had a little over two million acres in forests of their own. Lumber and paper companies added to their wooded acreage. Over 350 communities and 300 schools now have forests and are engaged in producing timber for various industrial and recreational uses. Future Farmers of America, 4-H and other clubs have planted many seedlings.

Another part of the reforestation program, Trees For Tomorrow, Inc., was founded in 1944 by the paper making industry of the central part of Wisconsin. This organization carries on a great deal of work, giving $2,500 each year in forestry scholarships and supplying educational materials to schools. It also gives summer courses and furnishes seedlings to interested groups.

One witness before the 1931-32 legislative committeee had suggested another way of solving some of Northern Wisconsin's problems. "Take a look at the maps," he had said,

> and you will find thousands and thousands of beautiful lakes in this northern region of Wisconsin. Gentlemen, let us capitalize on them—let them pay the taxes . . . I had one little 80 a few years ago and my taxes ran around $18 to $20 on it; today that is bringing in over a hundred because I have sold a few cottages to Chicago people—and they are paying for it.

Thanks to reforestation, increased travel by automobile, and improved highways, Wisconsin's "resort industry" became more and more important. The 1935 legislature recog-

nized that with an appropriation for advertising the recreation spots, streams and forests of the state. In 1928 it was said that resorts brought over $100 million into the state each year. Twenty years later the amount had tripled.

Non-residents testified to happy vacations in Wisconsin. " 'We think Wisconsin is the most beautiful country in the world, and have been through all of the 48 states,' " said one. " 'I will be back in Sayner, the little town of friendly people. . . . doubt if in the whole world there is more beauty and friendliness,' " said another. And again, " 'The whole state is tops in my book, but especially the northern half.' "[8]

The farm or forest controversy had been settled. After various and expensive experiments with free agricultural development, people discovered that reforestation advocates had been mainly in the right: much of the land was not good for farming, at least the kind of general, diversified farming that had been promoted. That knowledge had cost a lot in time, money and human resources. Perhaps though, it was only through trial and error that people really found out, and accepted the conclusions that were drawn.

Yet agricultural promoters had not been entirely wrong. Some of the land would produce crops, good crops. With careful study and the application of county zoning laws, a start was made toward finding the best farm land. The experience over the years had produced some results in putting the industrial, forest, farm and recreational resources of the northern counties to their fullest use.

People of Northern Wisconsin settled a land that presented unique problems, problems considerably different from those pioneers had met in other parts of the country. They experienced difficult times. Through hard work and perseverance those people solved many of their problems. They had capitalized on their many resources, making their part of the world important and valuable to themselves, as well as to others.

## NOTES

[1] John Swenehart, "Land Clearance and War Surplus Explosives," tape recording in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin manuscript collection; Arlan C. Helgeson, The Promotion of Agricultural Settlement in Northern Wisconsin, 1880–1925. Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1951, 274–88.

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[3] Helgeson, Promotion of Agricultural Settlement, 228–57.

[4] Statistics from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1910, 1920.

[5] Wisconsin Interim Committee on Administration and Taxation, Reports and Proceedings, 1925–1926 (11 volumes, typescript); Wisconsin Interim Committee on Forestry and Public Land, 1927–1929 (3 volumes, typescript); Vernon Carstensen, Farms or Forests, The Evolution of a Land Policy for Northern Wisconsin, 1850–1932, manuscript in possession of the author, Chapter VI; Helgeson, Promotion of Agricultural Settlement, 185–93.

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